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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on the activities of the Rural Continuing Education Centre (CREPA), a nongovernmental organization run by volunteers from small agricultural villages in the Las Villas area of Salamanca, Spain. The organization was founded in 1983 with the goal of improving living conditions and community life for villagers through social awareness and change. Activities included awareness-raising and information campaigns, training courses for women, development of an agricultural cooperative, recreational activities, and work study programs. Initial program evaluation concluded that a large portion of the population did not consistently participate in forums and that organizing efforts had become obsolete. In 1992-93, CREPA launched a new sociocultural action program aimed at addressing functional illiteracy and changing individual attitudes. Information cards were sent home every 15 days throughout the school year with the objective of conveying information and raising topics for discussion at bimonthly neighborhood meetings. These cards also encouraged the improvement of reading and writing skills. Program evaluation revealed that 95 percent of families accepted the new program; that initially there was a high degree of citizen participation, but participation declined during the winter months; and that the lack of economic means interfered with some social platforms initially planned for the program. However, many activities during the program's first year were deemed successful including information campaigns on nutrition, support for newspapers or magazines in two municipalities, implementation of an informal library, and promotion of an agricultural marketing cooperative. (LP)

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Chapter 2
TWELVE YEARS OF SOCIOCULTURAL ACTION IN THE LAS VILLAS AREA

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LAS VILLAS RURAL CONTINUING EDUCATION CENTRE

The Rural Continuing Education Centre (CREPA) is a nongovernmental cultural organization run by volunteers from local villages. Its initial purpose was to promote social and cultural initiatives in the Las Villas area of Salamanca, Spain. Educators, school teachers, psychologists, sociocultural group leaders, priests, adult education teachers, doctors, social workers and other professionals work with CREPA. The organization was essentially founded by citizens — young workers and students, housewives, farmers, old people, recreational councellors — who have continued over the years to form the backbone of the organization and manage its programs.

Our idea of sociocultural action in adult education is based on direct participation by target groups at all stages: analyzing the situation in our villages in general and by sector, organizing activities, planning and implementing measures proposed by different groups, evaluation, etc. A team of community workers dedicated almost exclusively to organizational tasks has also been involved in the program.

Over the last 12 years, CREPA has worked closely with a number of social, educational and cultural movements at both the national and provincial levels (Cáritas, Rural Schools, provincial cultural organizations, Christian Rural Movement, the General Council of Salamanca's Cultural Program); all of whom agreed with us on the need to defend and enhance rural life in Spain. We continue to cultivate these relationships, even though we must recognize that for the past few years pro-rural social and cultural movements have been losing steam and that we are losing intensity, zeal and the ability to mobilize people,

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due no doubt to the general process of impoverishment in the countryside and the grim outlook for the future.

Description of Area

The Las Villas area is located in the province of Salamanca, which is part of the Autonomous Community of Castilla-León. It is located off the Madrid-Salamancá highway, some 20-30 kilometers from Salamanca. There are 10 villages in Las Villas and some of our activities were carried out in all 10 (such as community work with farmers), but most programs were implemented in six only: Babilafuente (population 1,002), Cordovilla (150), Moriñigo (153), Villoria (1,396), Villoruela (1,081) and Francos (320).

For the new program, the village of Cordovilla has been replaced by Francos. It is interesting to note that Francos is a village which has not seen any cultural activity over the past 15-20 years, at least not of a sustained type. We will thus be able to compare and evaluate the response rate in relation to other villages with longstanding cultural traditions and saturation level exposure to the program.

With the exception of Francos, which was founded 40 years ago, the villages experienced a large wave of emigration in the 1960s. Today, the drain has been almost entirely stemmed. Few people are leaving and when they do, it is for temporary work in the hotel business, domestic service in the city, or it is graduates who are seeking work elsewhere. The population is however declining gradually due to an imbalance between births and deaths. In the three villages with more than 1,000 inhabitants, the proportion of children and young people is well above the average for rural populations in Salamanca province.

Las Villas is an irrigated agricultural area with mostly small and medium-sized farms. It suffers from the general problems of farming in Castilla-León. There is little livestock. Villoruela is an exception, for its economy is based on wickerwork.

Two Preliminary Questions

Literacy Education, Basic Education, Adult Education, Popular Education or Sociocultural Action?

I do not intend to examine the subtleties of what these terms mean to different educational experts and schools of thought. In this practical study, I will briefly define the meaning we ascribe to these terms.

Each of these terms has its own history and has been used to designate different educational and social approaches. I believe, however, that most people working with adults now use them to refer to similar contents and goals.

This convergence is probably a result of the declarations of UNESCO conferences (such as the International Conference on Adult Education, Paris, 1985), the agreements reached at international meetings of experts (for example, the Latin American Technical Consultation on Functional Illiteracy, Salamanca, Spain, 1988) and the official policies of each country (such as the White Paper on Adult Education, Department of Education and Science, Madrid, 1986).

We usually use the term **sociocultural action** because it embraces cultural, educational, social, vocational, economic and political objectives in their entirety. In material intended for the public, however, we prefer to use the terms **adult education, basic education** or **popular culture** because we feel they are more readily understood. But for us, each of these terms represents, in the final analysis, a response to the material, individual, family, social, economic and political needs of village inhabitants.

Is Sociocultural Action Still Relevant?

After 12 years of activity in the Las Villas area, the sociocultural group leaders asked themselves bluntly, before embarking on a new project, whether sociocultural action was still a valid means for improving living conditions and individual and community life for these villagers in particular and rural Spain in general.

Our experience of the past 12 years has left us with contradictory impressions and feelings. On the one hand, we have seen that activities carried out in the villages had a mobilizing effect on some segments of the population and bolstered some associations that serve to enrich individual and social life. On the other hand, we have also observed that a large portion of the population has not participated in these forums, or at best only sporadically and then preferably in recreational activities; and that organizing efforts, including all activities and all partial goals, wear out over the years, become elitist (leading to the formation of self-enclosed groups), and in the end lose all influence over the population as a whole.

Certainly the most disappointing conclusion, however, was that **sociocultural action** is an extremely limited tool, notwithstanding the theorizing and fashionable definitions, the expectations and goals that activists may set themselves. Its basic limitation is that major political (economic, social, cultural) decisions affecting rural regions are at odds with the aims of sociocultural action. The state of neglect endured by rural populations and their organizations renders us powerless against governments and national and international institutions whose decisions in most cases — official rhetoric aside — run counter to the interests of rural citizens.

Given the situation, with little to show after 12 years of work and deteriorating living conditions in the countryside following implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), what can we do? We believe only two

attitudes are possible:

- **Submit and survive** as best we can, accepting that only the individuals and regions capable of adapting to the new conditions brought on by membership in the EEC will escape unscathed.
- **Assume an active attitude** and work for change in rural living conditions by uncovering the causes of rural problems and seeking solutions which are within the grasp of rural populations.

In 1992-93, CREPA launched a new sociocultural action program that stems from the second attitude. The program's goals are to attain individual maturity, to change individualistic attitudes and to organize cultural, social and economic initiatives designed to improve the quality of rural life.

With a certain disenchantment, we began by asking ourselves questions about the validity of sociocultural action. We see around us other educational groups and even public institutions involved in adult education, changing their strategies, discarding education and culture as a means of mobilizing citizens and instead, are channelling their efforts, wherever possible, almost exclusively into economic projects. Despite the dissatisfactions and limitations we have discussed, our answer to the question is yes, although undoubtedly we shall have to set less ambitious goals. In the absence of other more effective sociopolitical instruments, sociocultural action remains a very useful tool to foster the creation and growth of attitudes (support for trade unions, cooperatives, etc.) and may indeed be the only tool available to villagers to try to better their lives.

COMPREHENSIVE SOCIOCULTURAL ACTION PLAN

In the Las Villas area, sociocultural activities began, at least in an organized way, in 1981 with the arrival of a group of Dominican priests. Their presence aroused expectations among individuals and groups in the villages, who then devised a **comprehensive sociocultural action plan**.

The initial aims were:

- to raise awareness of the situation in the villages and examine the causes;
- to break with the assigned roles performed by men and women in rural regions (working and producing); to discover other vital needs;
- to develop the habit of meeting, discussing, making decisions on a community basis; to prepare citizens for participation; to encourage a civic spirited attitude towards the interests of the tribe or family clan;
- to prompt people to organize on the basis of common interests;
- to consider continuing education as every individual's right and duty.

Even these initial goals required a long educational process, for they

demanded changes in deeply entrenched mental and social structures. Later, we would progress to more ambitious objectives: reforming production and distribution systems, setting up a viable cooperative, creating strong and representative agricultural unions, achieving active participation by rural citizens in all the institutions that affect their lives, providing appropriate vocational training, distributing agricultural information on an ongoing basis, creating new sources of employment and wealth, upgrading and modernizing social services and social and cultural facilities.

Phase One: Creating Centres & Schools

We began working simultaneously with two segments of the population where there was a demand by creating Cultural Centres for young people and Parenting Schools for parents. The Cultural Centres are open to everyone but attract primarily youths. They were used as a base for outreach to other segments of the population: children, women, the elderly, farmers. The centres flourished for three to four years before falling into stagnation and crisis (see Evaluation). The Parenting Schools consist of weekly or biweekly meetings, depending on the village (using the ECCA method). Over the years, most of these schools have become Parent Associations linked to the local elementary school or high school.

Leisure time educational activities are organized for children and teens on a weekly basis; summer schools and summer camps are set up during the summer. For the elderly, we have set up separate organizations and created places where they can meet and socialize.

Phase Two: The Founding Of CREPA (1983)

Once the Cultural Centres and Parenting Schools had realized their potential for organizing and conducting activities, participation gradually began to decline due to conflicts between different groups, loss of interest, burn-out in the first generation of active members, etc. It became clear that activities would have to be more specifically targeted in order to reach more people. General meetings were not having a sufficient mobilizing effect. We needed new methods and themes. Holding broad-based assemblies with spontaneous participation tended to leave by the wayside, those people with a weak cultural and participatory background.

The Rural Continuing Education Centre (CREPA) therefore decided to get involved in the following activities:

- awareness-raising and information campaigns: postering in public places, distributing pamphlets to households;
- women's section: general culture, specific training courses;

- farmer's section: Rural Week, the "Las Villas" cooperative;
- the college certificate: before and after;
- senior citizens' section: Seniors Week, recreational activities, lectures;
- work-study programs, workshops to enhance occupational skills and create jobs.

Phase Three: Cooperation Between CREPA & the Salamanca General Council

CREPA has been involved to varying degrees in the Adult Education Program sponsored by the General Council since the program's creation. The program was initially managed by officials at the province's cultural centres. At first, the General Council funded CREPA chapters. Later, it provided villages with a cultural coordinator. In the beginning, the CREPA program was followed for the most part. There was adequate coordination and allocation of duties. Later, territories and duties were divided between the coordinators and CREPA cultural agents, leading to a growing split and lack of coordination.

The General Council also slashed the number of coordinators and funding, causing a cultural development void in some areas which CREPA is not in a position to fill.

The Approach

It must be based on people's real circumstances: groups express their interests, and activities are planned on that basis.

It must be truly transformative: cultural dissemination is not enough. Prevailing conditions in each segment of the population must be changed. This is why segmental associations have been created.

It must be integrated: the approach must address the whole person in all his or her facets including education, personal life, family life, social and economic life.

It must address all segments of the population: not only adults, with whom possibilities are severely limited by the difficulty of changing attitudes and habits; not only children and youths, for family influences will draw them into traditional attitudes and lifestyles when they grow up.

It must be progressive, permanent and planned: it must be compatible with the pace of life in rural areas, which is slow, to be sure, but never stops; there is a risk of starting actions and then dropping them; activities must be analyzed, planned and reviewed.

Public Attitudes

Adult males: unreceptive, individualistic, fundamentally pessimistic. Accepted

social role: work. Normal daily cycle: work, family, TV, bar.

Women: very receptive; more socially sensitive due to their work, their use of time, being alone at home, yearning for liberation.

Young people: easier to make progress but difficult to keep them involved.

The elderly, children, teens: these segments of the population are relatively receptive and open to initiatives of all kinds.

Problems

In addition to public resistance and related difficulties, a number of external factors must be noted:

- premises not set up at the beginning, lacking furniture and heating for the long winter;
- infighting among cliques and political factions (an unfortunate effect of the political party system in small towns). Many activities have been blocked by divisions of this kind;
- lack of funds for any larger-scale project such as the creation of vocational workshops for unemployed youths;
- lack of coordination with public institutions, such as the National Employment Agency, the Department of Agriculture, etc.

General Evaluation

The first days of sociocultural activities in the Las Villas area in the fall of 1987 were held under the slogan "What is happening today in our villages?" The intention was to conduct an in-depth review of the sociocultural action program with the active participation of all segments of the population. The main topics of discussion were the specific needs of each segment, examination of the program to date, objectives attained and not attained, the level of mobilization and participation in each segment of the population, defining new objectives and new action strategies.

The general conclusions were:

- villages were mobilized through the creation of associations and the organization of activities. The response and the level of participation varied according to the segment of the population and the village. The initial objectives were mostly attained;
- but the majority of villages were not reached due to citizens' lack of motivation and lack of ability to relate, and due also to the use of inappropriate planning and methods;
- participants were painfully aware of the limitations of sociocultural action as an instrument for changing the village way of life. They saw it as a valid tool, but insufficient. It is dependant on other social, political and cultural bodies, which impose their agendas;
- the results of economic development projects were particularly wanting: the bag cooperative for unemployed youths survived for a few years and failed due to unfair demands by the concessionaire; the Las Villas regional cooperative failed

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to recruit enough members to set up its own facilities; a long series of meetings for the handicrafts cooperative in Villoruela came to naught due to the existence of opposing interests; the ceramics workshop did not survive; the Villoria protected agriculture cooperative foundered as soon as it tried to expand, due to lack of capital; the vocational workshops and greenhouse work-study programs did not yield results in the job market.

After this review was completed, there was a lack of will to attempt new approaches with the adult segments (although the work with children and teens continued), associations continued but proved largely inadequate in planning and participation. Because of the change in the social climate (a decline in social motivation and awareness), scepticism existed about the effectiveness of the existing arenas to really mobilize large segments of the population. There was weariness due to the fact that the burden or organizational work always fell on the same people year after year, and there was even an intensification of the work-family-TV-bar cycle and amusements on the weekend. There was also a lack of facilitators: many volunteers left and the professionals practically disappeared.

A NEW SITUATION IN OUR VILLAGES

For some years, rural Spain has been experiencing major changes, and it is likely that these will intensify in the years to come. The villages in the Las Villas area have not been spared these transformations; the changes must therefore be considered as the point of departure for any cultural or educational action.

Economic Situation

The two leading economic sectors in the Las Villas area are agriculture (in all villages) and wickerwork (in Villoruela only). These two sectors are currently experiencing a crisis, leaving the region under a cloud of uncertainty.

Agriculture is experiencing ill effects from Spain's membership in the Common Market. European surpluses have hit the area's traditional products hard: beet production has fallen, grain prices have dropped, all control has been lost over potato marketing, corn and sunflower production is suffering from uncertainty, etc. Farmers don't know what to grow anymore. An irrigation system has been set up in the area, but it in itself is no guarantee for the future.

The prevailing type of farming is not appropriate for achieving the level of competitiveness that European and international markets demand: most farms are small or medium-sized and the machinery is often absolete. Farmers are not actively involved in agricultural organizations, cooperatives or unions which could improve the viability of their operations and defend their rights against the administration. The only farming association in the area has very low participation.

The consequences of market pressure for reconversion have been swift in coming: lower revenues for most farmers, indebtedness, unemployment, discouragement, powerlessness. Farmers have not yet begun to leave the land, but some have started taking subsidies to let their land lie fallow rather than planting and working it.

Wickerwork is currently experiencing one of its most serious crises ever. The sector had grown without interruption for 25 years, breeding boundless enthusiasm and a steady rise in the standard of living in Villoruela, although it was at the price of long working hours for the whole family. Unbridled production and optimism in the sector masked two problems, namely the need for training and organization to secure the cottage industry's future. Nobody thought to specialize in design or marketing; in addition, overproduction led to a loss of interest in the quality of traditional products. The market was left to wholesalers, who set the prices of the raw materials and the finished product. The laws of the European and international markets opened the floodgates to higher quality, lower priced imports from the Far East (China, Thailand, Hong Kong, Indonesia), destroying the markets for our goods.

Here too the consequences were fast in coming: many people abandoned wickerwork totally or partly as soon as they had the opportunity to do so (over 40 workers left the sector last year), for family storerooms were overflowing with chairs for lack of buyers, prices were falling, disenchantment and pessimism were setting in, and the industry did not succeed in reorganizing (it may already be too late).

The small **industrial sector** which had long existed in the area has been wiped out over the past ten years. It had consisted of two brickyards and a flour mill, all located in Babilafuente. They had been the livelihood of many families in the village; now, they have been turned into a landfill site or repossessed by a realty company.

To be sure, the **services sector** is not huge, but the shops, bars, repair shops, etc. do support quite a number of families. Masonry was booming in recent years but it can be expected to enter a crisis as well, at least in the villages. The drop in earnings in other sectors — agriculture, crafts, — will inevitably affect the entire services sector.

Political & Social Situation

Democracy has come slowly to our villages. Formal democracy was accepted, to be sure, but there is no real political consciousness. The rate of membership in political parties is very low, disenchantment with the political process is growing, political and administrative institutions — regional, provincial and national — lack credibility, especially when it comes to defending rural interests. The municipal councils tend to be close to the people, whether or not specific policies enjoy public support. Local representatives of political parties are

overly dependent on the party leadership in the county seats, whose political power can decide the fate of projects submitted by the villages.

With respect to politics in the sense of citizen participation, the villages of the Las Villas area have changed significantly in the past ten years. An extensive network of participatory arenas has been created: children's movements, youth groups, cultural centres, women's associations, parents' associations, golden age groups, which have contributed, albeit with varying degrees of skill, to refashioning the social fabric and forging a new civic spirit.

The general social climate has also changed. The widespread optimism and high expectations of years past have given way to adjustments in some cases, weariness in others. While participation has declined, some small groups in our villages still have hope and are the symbol of a new way of life, remaining committed to being players at a time when the decisions are being made far from rural regions.

Mainstream Culture, Critical Culture

It has become commonplace to say that rural regions are gradually losing their own culture, that the villages have been invaded and colonized by the dominant urban culture. New modes of production, more travel — especially in villages located near the city — the return of emigrants to visit or to live permanently, and the influence of the media have all created a crisis for the traditional village way of life.

This observation should not lead us to cast urban culture and rural culture, town and country in mutual opposition. Our society's dynamism is gradually breaking down traditional barriers of place and carrying us towards a universal planetary way of life. The culture which now dominates all of society — including our villages — is a culture of **consumerism, individualism** and **competition**. Under a veil of **democratic values** (freedom, equal opportunity, participation, pluralism, etc.), it seeks to justify and perpetuate a profoundly antidemocratic economic and social system. This culture has invaded and attacked rural culture as it has other cultures (black culture, aboriginal culture, etc.), despising and destroying anything that is different. It seeks to standardize tastes, interests, practices, feelings, anything of interest to the market.

This culture may be seen as the ideological weapon of the world economic system which has divided humanity into two groups: master and slave, rich and poor, "developed" and "underdeveloped". Its goal is not personal fulfilment but simply to keep people adapted to the system. The concepts of **humanity** and **humanization** (justice, solidarity, austerity, critical spirit, creativity, personality, etc.) have been permanently devalued, even if these terms are presented as desirable goals in educational and political programs. Moreover, this dominant culture is now assuming new tones: **individualistic narcissism** and **disillusionment** are helping to turn people away from political concerns and

enclose them in the petty pleasures of daily life. This is undoubtedly the best way to ensure nothing changes.

Let us not be deluded: it is this culture which interests decision-makers and the holders of power. It is this culture with which the media bombards us daily and which holds sway in the schools in a somewhat moderated form; and this is the culture in which so many people, including villagers, lay their hopes for success and a better life.

There remains however another culture in our society and in our villages which may be called utopian-critical culture, culture of solidarity, popular culture (people's culture) which serves to mobilize individuals and groups to build future worlds as yet unknown. It uses a specific language: consciousness-raising, awareness; **Seeing**: evaluating, assessing, critiquing, denouncing; **judging**: creating, planning, building, joint action, transformation; **acting**. It does not judge people or things in terms of their economic profitability but on the basis of what they are and what they mean. This is the foundation for actions which spring from dedication and conviction, to reclaim and support home-grown art and culture and daily social interaction among citizens (get-togethers, parties, etc.). This type of culture is still alive in our villages, though it is slowly waning.

A NEW SOCIOCULTURAL PROJECT

A group of people, including some from the old CREPA team and some newcomers, felt there was an urgent need for consciousness-raising to overcome the crisis of community organizing of recent years and help citizens respond to the current crisis in our villages in an active and critical way.

During the evaluation, we found that most citizens never attend cultural events or participate in civic forums, municipal councils, political parties, trade unions. We estimate that this is true for 80% of inhabitants in all age brackets; the figures are higher still for those aged over 50. We consider this to be a relative failure, for one of the objectives of the former plan had been to reach all, or at least most, village inhabitants. We could only conclude that the old plan was inappropriate. The results suggest that we must consider adopting different methods and contents for the program so as to adapt it to the real circumstances of the majority of the population.

Evaluation of Functional Illiteracy in Our Villages

After 12 years of ongoing contact with a given population, one comes to know its specific characteristics. Our plan was to conduct a more in-depth study of pockets of functional illiteracy: to locate, assess, describe, and analyze their causes. After this study, a new, realistic and viable educational project was to be

set up to address the 80% of the non-participating population whom we identify as functionally illiterate.

The project team conducted a qualitative study of three age groups: youths, the middle-aged and pensioners, by means of questionnaires and meetings. The following general profile emerged:

- little or no participation in CREPA programs. This fact reflects lack of interest, lack of motivation and interpersonal difficulties; clearly, it is also an indication that the methods and contents were inadequate;
- poor attitudes and practices with respect to associations;
- low level of education: elementary school in the case of adults, college certificate in the case of young people and the middle-aged;
- little or no reading and writing in everyday life;
- inadequate and uniform use of community media, almost no exercise of the right to information and free speech;
- low self-esteem in terms of culture and education, resulting in insecurity, embarrassment and social blocks;
- inadequate vocational preparation for current job or for career goal;
- little knowledge of, use of and satisfaction with the practical skills demanded by modern life (dealing with bureaucracy, banking, handling household appliances or machinery in the workplace, voting, etc.);
- outdated skills and knowledge in basic areas: nutrition, hygiene, health, medicine, environmental education, etc.;
- inadequate preparation for assuming family responsibilities and living together.

Main Concerns

The three target groups reported their concerns, apprehensions, problems, specific group and individual situations:

1. young people: labour rights, unionization; vocational information; the difficulty of finding a job in the villages; family and relationships; leisure and entertainment; use of community media; village organizing, etc.;
2. the middle-aged: family (parents and children); their children's future; education; health instruction; community media; public affairs education; general culture; the grim prospects for agriculture; individualism; the failure of cooperatives, etc.;
3. the elderly: family; relations among the generations; social change; community media; social organization in the village; social and economic rights; hygiene and preventive medicine, etc.

The results will serve to help develop a new sociocultural action strategy.

These fundamental concerns represent areas of interest which can serve as a basis for a **Basic education and sociocultural action** program designed to provide citizens with the training and information they need, and to support the search for solutions to villagers' daily problems. **This brings us back to the fundamental principle that genuine adult education must proceed from the participants' own experiences and real-life situations.**

New Methodology

How could we reach the entire population? We could not repeat the old formula, even with a new content. We therefore drew up a three-part sociocultural action plan.

1. Outreach cards

Where are the people who never accept repeated invitations and never participate in any activity in any program? They're at home! Home and family are therefore the logical site for the new program to target, but the problem was finding a way to contact each family. The only viable solution was to send them written material (cards) simply presented with colours, illustrations and uncrowded layout, with accessible content (basic, linear) and using plain, simple, familiar language.

We then had to decide on the content, basing our ideas on the positive results from written material used in the Santibáñez de Béjar project (see "A cultural empowerment process in rural areas" by Joaquin Carasco).

For the preliminary stages, we set up a pilot team (10 people of different backgrounds) on which to test response to the frequency of card delivery. The response has been very positive. We have decided to reduce the number of cards and spread out the delivery.

The new schedule calls for the CREPA program to be spread over three consecutive school years. The following frequency is considered feasible and acceptable for the entire population: two cards sent to every home every 15 days throughout the school year. Segmental cards will be distributed only to the segments of the population in question and at the times considered appropriate.

The immediate objectives of the cards will be:

- to convey information and raise topics for discussion by individuals and families; to broaden people's knowledge; to present concrete problems;
- to create reading habits;
- to encourage writing (which is increasingly neglected by adults) by leaving spaces for comments and soliciting answers to questionnaires.

2. Neighbourhood meetings & segmental meetings

The study revealed poor attitudes and practices with respect to associations and a trend towards cocooning due to lack of interest, lack of motivation and interpersonal problems. How could we address this situation at the educational level?

We felt that meetings at a neighbourhood level were indispensable to try to break the daily cycle of work-family-TV-bar (on the weekends), which has been

15

reinforced by the modern way of life. But another attempt to organize meetings by inviting the whole village proved to have negative results in the past. This division into neighbourhoods has two advantages:

- it capitalizes on a traditional, deeply-entrenched sense of identification of the neighbourhood before the village. This feeling stems from personal and family relationships and from daily physical proximity, which inspires trust;
- it enables us to organize smaller meetings, facilitating participation and avoiding stage-fright for the people with the worst cultural inferiority complexes.

The division is based on results of other events of recent years in which participation has been high: religious activities, neighbourhood efforts to solve common problems, holiday celebrations, recreation activities.

These neighbourhood meetings will be held at the rate of one meeting every 15 days throughout the school year, to follow up on the two cards distributed to homes the previous week. Segmental meetings are planned only for appropriate groups — farmers, young people, the elderly — who are less likely to attend the neighbourhood meetings. The segmental meetings will be village-wide as there is no problem of too many participants.

The meetings are intended to be an arena where everyone can speak, where people can discuss the content of the cards and the questionnaires. This method is the most appropriate for adults, as it encourages participation and follows up on a process of information distribution and reflection, especially with a moderator, to aid discussion in groups where people are not used to speaking.

Given the simple content of the cards, the discussion can be expected to yield a more in-depth treatment of the issues based on each participant's experience. In some cases, additional documentation may be introduced.

3. Practical services

Adult education must prompt changes in individual attitudes. Sociocultural action must spark a process of transformation and lead to improved services and living conditions in the villages. The purpose of this third stage of the CREPA program is therefore to seek solutions to the problems which have been uncovered and to pursue the initiatives proposed during the group discussion of issues.

Without replacing the organizations and associations in which the 20% of the population are already involved, the goal is to secure steady participation by the 80% of the population which is not currently involved in the institutions and associations that form the social backbone of our villages. One of the cards — *information on institutions* — was intended precisely to arouse a desire for information and a willingness to participate in the various groups.

A FIRST GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT PROGRAM

The program includes an on-going assessment mechanism and uses family group leaders. When the questionnaires are distributed every two weeks, the group leaders, through their conversations with the families, evaluate the degree of acceptance and follow-up of the program. This makes it possible to gradually make corrections in the procedure for preparing the questionnaires, the schedule for meetings and so on. To this end, family group leaders are offered a wide range of on-going assessment material.

Here are the most significant data available at the present time.

Home distribution of questionnaires

The program was accepted by 95% of the families in various villages and municipalities. This shows that there was initially great interest in it. Approximately 80% of the common questionnaires were read by the women in the families. Among the men, the rate was only about 30% (the response rate was 80% for the sectoral questionnaire for farmers). Children of age in the families generally showed little interest. As for comprehension of the questionnaires, no one indicated any problem. This is significant, since the need for informal language was one of the serious challenges of the program.

The rate of response for the section of the questionnaire in which a personal answer, in writing, was required was very low: 5% to 10%. This major objective in basic education is not being achieved.

Meetings in neighbourhoods & sectors

In the first quarter, before the Christmas holiday, the rate of participation was about 40%. After Christmas, it dropped by almost half: the meetings were held at a late hour (after a day of work), making it difficult for adults and mothers with small children to attend; the very cold weather in the Castillian winter; the poorly equipped premises, people forgetting to attend, the fact that such gatherings were not customary, the participatory style of the meetings, which resembled a "tertulia", a small get-together in the back room of a café, which was to the liking of those who participated regularly. There was massive participation in the farmers' sectoral domain.

Creation of services of practical use

The lack of economic means and the complexity of the program made it

impossible to set up some of the social platforms initially envisaged, such as the family orientation workshop and the labour market orientation workshop for young people, which required greater specialization. The remainder of the "yes" domains were supplemented by the following practical activities: information campaigns on nutrition, support for newspapers or magazines in two municipalies, implementation of the sub-program entitled "A Library in Our Home" (1630 books in constant circulation, from family to family); support for zonal demands (the fight to keep the train that was to be eliminated), promotion and advice for the agricultural marketing cooperative, "Las Villas del Tormes", to which 97 farmers now belong; organization and management of a course for recreational coaches; management of the psychotechnical workshop at the regional institute.

In the initial phase, i.e. until Christmas, there was a very high degree of participation. Then it declined in the winter months, and picked up somewhat in the spring.

It may be too much to ask adults to pay constant attention during a complete course from October to June. This requires encouragement and development of the sectoral domains, which, because of the specific nature of the subjects, motivate participants more. An attempt has been made in the course to compensate for this loss of interest through the implementation of a sub-program entitled "A Library in Our Homes".

There was the same type of resistance — indifference, reading and writing problems, a lack of motivation to leave their homes to attend meetings, a lack of continuity, particularly in sectors with greater functional illiteracy. Experience has shown that it is increasingly difficult to break the very firmly rooted, vital circle of home-family-television-bar, which persists in some sectors of the population.

Hence, the objectives of the program have been achieved, but only partially. Since the program is so broad and complex, and is being implemented in various villages, some phases and aspects have more impact than others, depending on the village and the sector of the population.

This is also only the first year of the program, which must be developed before the degree to which its objectives have been achieved can be assessed in detail. At the present time, and with the necessary corrections that are gradually becoming apparent (a less extensive schedule, a greater role for the sectoral domains), we believe that the program is a valid tool for encouraging the cultural and socioeconomic mobilization of the zone and, ultimately, for improving the quality of lif of all those living in the villages and municipalities.